

**GEORGE E. GOODFELLOW**

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CARLYLE defined history as the essence of innumerable biographies. Such a definition may not find favor with historiographers, but there is nevertheless in all human hearts the element of hero-worship. The history of what man has accomplished in this world is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked there. The history of medicine finds its lure in the study of the lives of those men who contributed to its development.

Dr. George E. Goodfellow has won a lasting niche for himself in the illustrious pantheon of medical science alongside the master surgeons of America, chiefly through his contribution to the surgery of the prostate gland.

He was born in Downieville, Sierra County, California, on December 23, 1855, where his father, Milton J. Goodfellow, had settled after crossing the plains with a train of oxen teams and covered wagons in 1849. His early life was spent in California and Nevada. At the age of twelve he was sent east to school, returning home in 1869. He attended the California Military Academy in Oakland and the University of California. He had a strong leaning toward naval and military life, and was appointed to Annapolis at sixteen. While there it seems that one of the upper classmen was insulted by a "plebe" (freshman), and being of powerful build and impetuous courage George was elected to fight for the honor of his class. His opponent, fresh from the plow and hard as nails, gave him a hard battle but George emerged victorious and his opponent required hospitalization. As a result of this escapade, George was court-martialed and suspended, or dismissed from the academy. He then became interested in the study of medicine with his cousin, Dr. T. B. Lashells, an eminent surgeon practicing in Pennsylvania. Graduating from Cleveland Medical College (University of Wooster) with honors in 1876, he first practiced in Oakland, California, for some months, then went to Prescott, Arizona, to take over the mining practice at a large mine of which his father, a mining engineer, was then in charge. This, together with outside work, gave him a large field for surgery. His love of military life was still strong within him for he became a contract surgeon at Whipple Barracks near Prescott and at Fort Lowell. He secured permission to join General Custer, but the documents from Washington were delayed, and thus, no doubt, he was spared to do other things.



His next move was to the then flourishing camp in southeastern Arizona, called Tombstone, the apotheosis in wickedness and lawlessness of all the famous old mining towns of the far west. Here he remained until 1892 when he removed to Tucson to take the position as surgeon with the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Dr. Goodfellow put much time and thought into the matter of gunshot wounds. In this wild and lawless frontier country he had a wealth of material, because disputes were frequent and were generally settled with the revolver. It usually took heroic efforts to save the fellow who had absorbed a slug from a "forty-five," but his skill and experience won him such a reputation throughout the southwest that duellists frequently stipulated that he be within calling distance. However, it was an everlasting disappointment to him that he was never able to save the life of a person shot through the abdomen by a forty-five caliber Colt, the little ornament worn by so many frontiersmen in those days. He, himself, always carried one as a part of his wearing apparel, and emerged victorious from more than one shooting episode. He was as dexterous with the revolver as with the scalpel. His courage was of the desperate type which knew no fear. That period of our history in which he was a prominent figure is well told in two thrilling narratives: *Tombstone*, by Walter Noble Burns, and *Heldorado*, by William Breakenridge.

In the position of coroner, he was called upon to examine the dead as well as to treat those who might survive in a shooting episode. As a result of "assessment work" on the remains of an unfortunate gentleman who had been badly shot up he found the body, "rich in lead, but too badly punctured to hold whiskey." Dr. Goodfellow had ample opportunities to study the phenomena of shock. He recites an instance where a bullet, after passing through Morgan Earp lodged in the thigh of an innocent bystander. The latter died. "His injury," said Doctor Goodfellow, "was inconsequential and hardly more than an abrasion. Technically he died from shock. The simple fact is the man was scared to death." His work was not alone confined to traumatic surgery, but he was called upon to do everything from cataracts to abdominal sections, often under the most difficult conditions on kitchen tables far out in the country with little in the way of facilities except his own boldness and initiative. He took great pride in his surgical dexterity and went to great lengths to develop it. He was not content with following in the footsteps of others, but thought deeply and performed valuable researches, which unfortunately were lost along with a library of rare and valuable books which he had collected. However, the *Index Medicus* contains references to a number of articles published by him on a variety of topics. He made frequent trips to eastern centers to advance his surgical knowledge. By a curious coincidence his reputation for skill spread into Mexico. He was a student always, not only of his profession but of languages, several of which he learned to read and speak fluently. Philosophy was another of his interests, but geology he loved next to surgery, a hobby which led him to organize and conduct a party of scientists





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1855-1910





into Mexico after a big earthquake, about 1887. There, far into the interior of Sonora, he found maimed victims and did all in his power for them. The Mexican Government recognized him and presented him with tokens of esteem.

Like Edna Ferber's hero in *Cimarron*, when the Spanish-American War broke out this adventurous frontiersman, always in the vanguard, went as aide to General Shafter with the post of surgeon on his staff and the rank of colonel. He was active in all the fighting of Spaniards and disease from Siboney to Santiago. Then, when the time came for negotiations for the surrender of the city and all the Spanish Army, it was found that of all the members of General Shafter's staff, Dr. Goodfellow was the only one who was a complete master of Spanish. As a consequence, the negotiations were turned over to him. It is said that his tact and knowledge prevented the spilling of much unnecessary blood. He suffered from dysentery contracted in the Cuban campaign, but on recovering came to San Francisco where he remained for eight years and quickly established a lucrative surgical practice. His scintillating surgery rapidly made him the cynosure of all eyes among his colleagues. He was noted for his epigrammatic sayings, one of which was, "A surgeon should have the eye of an eagle, the heart of a lion, and the touch of a woman. Your mission in life is to relieve, not to cause, suffering and pain." One might say that this paraphrases the ancient aphorism of Gui de Chauliac, "Let the surgeon be well educated, skillful, ready, and courteous. Let him be bold in those things that are safe, fearful in those that are dangerous, avoiding all evil methods and practices."

It was during his sojourn in San Francisco that Dr. Goodfellow developed his operation of prostatectomy. Young, in Keen's *Surgery*, gives him credit for priority in first successfully performing the operation of prostatectomy. Hamer, in his presidential address before the American Urological Association in 1929, stated: "The published record indicates that median perineal prostatectomy was first performed by Watson in 1889, Wishard in 1890, and Goodfellow in 1891. Each of these three operated without knowledge that it had been previously done." It does not lessen Goodfellow's achievement that he must share priority with men who worked independently and co-incidentally. He was among the first to use spinal anæsthesia and to advocate the open air treatment for tuberculosis.

Dr. Goodfellow's restless adventurous frontier spirit could not long brook the restraints of city life, so in 1906 after the San Francisco earthquake and fire catastrophe he chose to go back to Mexico, urged by his intimate friend, Colonel Randolph, as surgeon in chief of the Southern Pacific Railroad of Mexico to establish the hospital system there, his charge going south to Mazatlan and east to El Paso. While thus engaged he was seized with multiple neuritis and, after a lingering illness, died in Los Angeles on December 7, 1910. Thus came to a premature end the life of a man whose meteoric career was filled to overflowing with romance, glamour, and useful accomplishment.







